

TRANSCRIPT OF PODCAST

WORK WITH PURPOSE EPISODE #77

EMBRACING NEURODIVERSITY IN THE PUBLIC SECTOR

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DAVID PEMBROKE: Hello everyone and welcome to Work With Purpose, a podcast about the Australian Public service. My name's DAVID PEMBROKE. Thanks for joining me. As we begin today's program, I'd like to acknowledge the traditional custodians of the land from which we broadcast today, the Ngunnawal people, and pay my respects to their elders past, present, and emerging. And acknowledge the ongoing contribution they make to the life of our city and this region. I'd also like to acknowledge the custodians of all the lands from where anybody is listening to this podcast today. So, Work with Purpose is back for 2023. And what better way than a conversation that draws attention to the diversity of people we are fortunate to have working for all Australians here at the Australian public service.

Today, we discuss neurodiversity. And when I say neurodiversity, according to definitions provided by Dr. Nick Walker, I mean the diversity of human minds where there is an infinite variation in neurocognitive functioning. In this context, neurodivergent means having a mind that functions in ways which diverge significantly from the dominant societal standards of normal. Neurodivergence, the state of being neurodivergent, can be largely or entirely genetic and innate, or it can be largely or entirely produced by brain-altering experience or some combination of the two.

Workplaces stand much to gain from making workplaces more inclusive of neurodiversity. Research published in the Harvard Business Review suggests that teams with neurodivergent professionals in some roles can be 30 per cent more productive than those without them. Inclusion and integration of neurodivergent professionals can also boost team morale. And I can attest to the benefits of neurodivergence because here at contentgroup, one of our talented team identifies as neurodivergent, and she is fantastically productive and a great influence around the office.

In the public sector, there is still more we can do to be inclusive, where we have a higher than average unemployment rate for people with autism. Today, we discuss neurodiversity in the workplace, how the public sector might go about making workplaces more inclusive, and changing the story from one about challenges to one of opportunity. Joining me in the studio today are three public service thought leaders. LEE STEEL, who is the First Assistant Secretary of the Intergovernmental Relations and Reform branch at the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet. And she's also an Ability Network champion. Her division is responsible for Commonwealth

state relations, including National Cabinet and advice to the Prime Minister and Cabinet on health and age care policy. Lee's previous senior executive roles include land transport policy in the Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Communications, and in the Cabinet Secretariat in the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet. Lee is also PM&C's Ability Network Champion. Welcome to you, Lee.

LEE STEEL: Thanks, David. It's lovely to be here.

DAVID PEMBROKE: Next up we have ROBIN EDMONDS, who is the co-chair of the PM&C Ability Network. She's also an Inclusion and Diversity Advisor at PM&C. Robin has been co-chair of the PM&C Ability Network since 2021 and led a range of disability inclusion and accessibility initiatives across the department. Her ongoing advocacy is informed by her lived experience of queer, neurodivergent and disabled identity. Good to have you, Robin.

ROBIN EDMONDS: Thanks David.

DAVID PEMBROKE: And finally, we're joined by ANDREW PFEIFFER from the PM&C Ability Network Executive Team. Andrew is also an advisor in the Behavioural Economics Team at the Australian Government, which is BETA, which is a part of PM&C. And after discovering he's autistic, Andrew co-founded the ATO's Neurodiversity Network, which now has over 600 members. Andrew is also the co-founder and co-chair of the cross-agency APS Neurodiversity Community of Practice. And after an incredible community response to his recent TED Talk, Andrew is now a highly sought-after speaker and advocate for neurodiversity inclusion. Andrew, welcome to Work with Purpose.

ANDREW PFEIFFER: Thank you so much, David.

DAVID PEMBROKE: So today, we want to take a slightly different approach and we want to go into the future, so let's set the scene. It's 2028 and public sector workplaces have reviewed and improved their work environments to optimally leverage the skillsets of neurodivergent and neurotypical people. Now, this is a question to all of you, and I might start with you, Lee. Can you paint us a picture of what that might look like if we get it right into the future?

LEE STEEL: Thanks, David. I'd like to see a more capable APS that reflects the public we serve, including more representation of neurodivergent people at senior levels, but also managers and senior leaders who

model inclusive behaviours. This need is to be enabled by a stronger focus on outcomes and impact rather than discreet behaviours and styles. We need to reimagine what leadership looks like and be more flexible in the way we conceive of leadership and recognise the impacts we have, without having a fixed view of styles. There's great diversity in our people, so we need to think about how jobs can match people and not take a one-size-fits-all approach.

DAVID PEMBROKE: And so, in terms then of, you mentioned that point around leadership, what advice do you have for people to take on that leadership and to be able to achieve those outcomes that you speak about?

LEE STEEL: I think it's to, as an individual, look inside yourself and think where can I be more flexible and listen to other people and see what they bring to the table that I might not myself bring? And open up conversations with your teams about how you can work in a team environment to make the best of everyone's capability. And that may mean some additional flexibility or different ways of working, but it can enable a richer outcome in terms of a more diverse perspective on what we do in our program delivery and our policy design in the way we engage with our community. And at the heart of what we do in the public service, it is about serving our community. And given the representation of disability and neurodivergence in our community, we need to have that capability within our own system, but also be able to engage with a breadth of experience in the community more broadly.

DAVID PEMBROKE: Okay. Robin, to you, welcome to 2028.

ROBIN EDMONDS: Wow, that was quick.

DAVID PEMBROKE: Describe it for me. What are you seeing? What are some of those behaviours that you're seeing where we've made that improvement and we're really working well to get the benefit from having this wonderful diverse group of people working in the interests of all Australians?

ROBIN EDMONDS: I think for me what that looks like in you know, ideal world 2028 is just accessibility by default. And what I mean by that is that every element of the workplace, it's no longer a question of what do we have to change, what do we have to spend, what do we have to do to get a

diverse or a disabled or a neurodivergent individual into the workplace? But knowing that that workplace will be accessible, will be welcoming. Whether that's a matter of the communications being accessible, whether it's the workplace itself, the office, or whether it's just our modes of work, like what Lee was starting to talk about there as well, the way in which we relate and engage with our staff.

DAVID PEMBROKE: So again, in terms of achieving that though, what are some of the things that you've seen in the past that have worked to start to develop this culture of acceptance and normalisation of what you're talking about?

ROBIN EDMONDS: I think if you want to talk about really visible examples, flexible work arrangements and working from home during COVID, that's certainly been a big one. And these benefit so many different cross-sections in our society, not only those who are immunocompromised, but also those who have childcare responsibilities and those who are neurodivergent or have other needs. So that's just sort of one example of how it could look good. But I think there are a lot of other examples that the APS has been working on more recently. The APSC has worked on things like having a reasonable-adjustments passport. The idea being that you can talk about what kind of adjustments you need in the workplace and store that information together in one place. And when you move throughout the department or even across the APS, you might be able to take that with you. Cut down the time that it takes for you to get in the door to being productive and engaging with your work. And these are really simple things. It's really just being able to communicate what people need. So I think that open and accessible communication at every phase is where you start to see the difference with you know, very little I think, outlay as well for the organisation.

DAVID PEMBROKE: Yeah, okay. And for you, Andrew, we're in 2028, what are you seeing that would give us the confidence I suppose, and the satisfaction that we have made progress?

ANDREW PFEIFFER: Yeah, I think one of the things that I would love to see and I think we can see in 2028 is recruitment processes that actually test a candidate's aptitude for the job, recruitment processes that don't massively overvalue the ability of candidates to write job applications in a very specific way, or to answer interview questions in a very specific way. At the moment with job applications, there's a level of ambiguity that many neurodivergent people can find challenging around how the written application is assessed. And then when you go

into an interview, you have to answer the questions in a very specific way, often the staff format. Sometimes you'll get multi-part questions, where you don't even have the questions written down in front of you, and so you have to simultaneously hold onto each of the parts of the question in your head along with thinking about what's the most relevant example that I can use to respond to this question. And that's just a really bad way to test a candidate's aptitude for the job.

DAVID PEMBROKE: That sounds stressful.

ANDREW PFEIFFER: It is.

DAVID PEMBROKE: So how much change though needs to take place for you know, for something like that to be reformed? Is it a big change or a small change to be able to make it more accessible?

ANDREW PFEIFFER: I should say from the outset that I'm not a recruitment professional, and so my understanding of legislative requirements is limited compared to say recruitment professionals. And I should also say that anything I'm expressing here is only my own view and not that of the department. But I think there's some low-hanging fruit that we could achieve very, very quickly. We can educate interview panels on things like if someone's not giving you eye contact, it's not because they're a less good candidate for a particular position. Many neurodivergent people struggle to give eye contact, myself included. And I think one of the things that we could very easily do is make it the default to give candidates the interview questions a short time before the interview, so that that way they've got something to prepare from. And that way they can actually demonstrate, at least to a greater extent than a traditional interview, their aptitude for the job.

DAVID PEMBROKE: So as part of APS reform, there is a focus on ensuring that the public service workforce does represent the community that it serves. Can you tell us a bit more about why it's worthwhile making workplaces more neurodiversity inclusive? It's a difficult word, isn't it? Sometimes trying to get it out.

ANDREW PFEIFFER: For sure. And this is something that's very close to my heart because I used to work for the APS Reform Office at PM&C as well. And when I spoke at TEDx Canberra, one of the analogies that I used to illustrate neurodiversity, or neurodivergence more to the point, is that of the spiky skills profile. So what the spiky skills profile says is that for people that are neurotypical, their strengths and challenges, if you were to plot them on a graph, represent something of a gentle wave.

Whereas for neurodivergent people, their strengths and challenges represent a much larger wave. So, their strengths and their challenges are much more pronounced. And as we, as we move to such a data-driven environment, as we move in an environment where things like IT, cybersecurity are really, really important, they're fields that many neurodivergent people are particularly gifted in.

DAVID PEMBROKE: Okay. So, Robin, to you, when you contrast that to what workplaces look like at the moment, what are some of the challenges that neurodivergent people are facing at the moment? And these might be quite unique to individuals, but could you just highlight some of those for us?

ROBIN EDMONDS: Yeah, absolutely. There are two concepts I'm going to bring into this that I think will come up a lot. And one of them is intersectionality, another really easy word to say. And the other one is a bit of discussion about these sort of models of disability, which I know is another question that you'd received, so just touching on that. But when it comes to the challenges that people face, their experiences tend to not be one size fits all. The saying that it comes to neurodivergent people is always when you've met one neurodivergent person, you've met one neurodivergent person, and that's never truer than when you're trying to organise a good environment for them in the workplace. So you know, those challenges also layer with various other things.

So you know, how my autism exhibits might be quite different to someone else or you know, Andrew's. And similarly, with other disabilities or with various needs that you might have, your needs will be different. But for every individual, the layers of diversity and experiences kind of form a complex shading or colour that gives you their intersectionality, so that is, you might have additional challenges if you are neurodivergent and you are also a woman, or maybe you're a younger manager and you're trying to really sort of establish yourself in the workplace. So that's just a quick nod to intersectionality, which we commonly refer to as well with other forms of diversity, particularly people of colour and cultural and linguistic diversity, and various other factors. So once you have that, that's one piece of the puzzle. Everybody has a complex little bit-

DAVID PEMBROKE: Just in terms of that, before we move on to that, how hard is it to make those assessments that you're talking about? Because as you mentioned, quite reasonably, every individual is an individual, and so each of their needs, needs to be dealt with, you know, in order to get

the best out of them. So again, is it complex, is it difficult or is it really just a mindset shift to... As Lee was suggesting early, it's really just about being more open and a little bit more patient?

ROBIN EDMONDS: Yeah, it's absolutely a mindset shift. Don't assume you know, that somebody is going to need the same things as somebody else in the same situation, and you just need to be open to that. And the other thing is I think just the attitude needs to shift, and that's probably the biggest barrier at the moment to getting support for a lot of people is that they're really scared about the stigma around either you know, sort of coming out as neurodivergent or as disabled, if they identify that way, how their manager's going to respond. And how the organisation will see that in terms of a commitment or an expenditure, or, "Oh, do we want to invest this much money?" And that is the attitude that really needs to change as well. And a lot of people will find that they're self-selecting out of even asking for support because they're worried about what that stigma or what that response might be because it's not something you can take back.

DAVID PEMBROKE: Now. Sorry, I interrupted you because I think the second point you were going to was around this notion of models of disability.

ROBIN EDMONDS: Yes, I love a tangent. So, I think this comes to the attitude point. Often in Australia, you might have heard terms like the charity model and the social model of disability. A lot of disability advocates talk about that, and it applies to reasonable adjustments more broadly. But in Australia, we often find ourselves landing in this charity model of disability, where someone has a disability and we, you know we, open the door for them, it's, "Oh, that's so nice of you to open the door." Instead of, "Why the hell wasn't that door made accessible in the first place? How is somebody using a wheelchair meant to get into this building, you know?" And it's a matter of expectations.

This charity model? No, I don't think it's charity to expect somebody to contribute and do their best in the workplace. That is them adding value to your organisation. And as the stats you put up mentioned and more recent ones from the Australian Network on Disability, it increases retention, morale, productivity, creativity, innovation, having that diversity. So, the social model of disability is starting to embed accessibility within that. And then there's also you know, more recently that movement towards the human rights model of disability. That is, don't I have a right to contribute to the workplace I'm a part of and don't I have a right to really you know, even have the opportunity to contribute in the way that others do?

DAVID PEMBROKE: So Lee, how can workplaces better tap into the benefits of having people who are neurodivergent, such that it can improve work and also build those policies and processes that make sure that you are you know, gathering up those benefits? Because again, I speak from personal experience here at contentgroup, it has been wonderful. It's been wonderful for the team here and it's been wonderful for our output. Some of it's just next level, the quality that we are getting from that team member.

LEE STEEL: I think it's a great question and I think part of the challenge is there's no one size fits all, but it does start with a mindset change, as Robin said. I think it's trying to look at the opportunity to attract and retain talent and have that talent thrive in the APS. We have an imperative too. We've got a really competitive jobs market, and there are some really great people who want to be in the workplace who aren't being enabled, or we might bring them in, but we don't enable them to thrive. So, it starts with that mindset change. But in terms of what we do, it has to be bespoke to each environment.

We've got a lot of diversity in our work environments in the APS, very diverse roles, very diverse requirements, very diverse sort of capability sets we're looking for. And in some ways, that is great because neurodivergence is also very diverse. You know, we've got people who have extreme focus, who have creativity, who have excellent data skills, who are great effectively auditing type skills. So, it is very much about trying to work out how do you match skills to the outcomes and impact you're trying to have and try to use those capabilities rather than expect every individual to be the perfect worker, which I don't know that anyone is. But it is that sense of trying to build a team with disparate skills that work well as a team, but works for that environment. And it's also, again, when we are thinking about what we do in the public service, we've got to understand, well, what's the impact we're trying to have on the community?

We do have a lot of work across the Public service, which is about service delivery, which is about working with the community. And if a large proportion of our community is neurodivergent, then understanding that is an important part of what we do, so we can tap into it with a more diverse workforce and being more strategic about how we use that workforce. But I think it's also imperative that we engage with the community really well and get that feedback about what's working and what's not working. Are there services we are providing or programs we're providing that work for some people but not for others? And how do we ensure that those people who are

missing out currently, where can we work with them differently? So, I think that's what I'm talking about. But it's a tricky one because there's not a silver bullet that's the perfect solution for everyone.

DAVID PEMBROKE: But interestingly in the APS, people are time-poor and crushed by time and demands and the needs to deliver. And this takes a little bit of time, doesn't it, to get it right? Maybe not a lot of time, but people will be thinking, "Oh, is this just another thing that I have to do on top of everything else that I've got to do?" So how do we change that in such a way that people accept that this just has to be done to get the benefits because the benefits are real.

LEE STEEL: It's true. Well, I guess it's like many things where you've got to invest up upfront to get the benefit. And that can be as simple as with every new team member, having that conversation, which is, "What is it that enables you to be at your best? How do you like to work? How do you communicate? Where are your skills and where are your, you know, weaknesses? And we'll work on your strengths, we'll work on your skills and make use of that." And that applies to people without neurodivergence as well. Everybody has different skills and strengths and different preferences in how they work. And that should be an investment everyone should make in a team environment, in a workplace to make sure we are being as effective as possible. Because the amount of time and effort you save by having some of those discussions upfront is worth it. Beyond that, in terms of jobs and skills matching, I think there can be more we can do to try to articulate what we are looking for better in terms of what is the outcome, not the way in which we do the job, a bit like Andrew was saying as well.

DAVID PEMBROKE: Yeah. So, Andrew, building better workplaces obviously needs people to work together. And there's a question from Carolyn McDonald on LinkedIn and she asks of you, "Do you have some tips or guidance for managers on how to support neurodiverse employees in the workplace? How can they be allies?"

ANDREW PFEIFFER: Very good question. There's a phrase that I really love, and it says nothing about us, without us. I'm going to repeat it again for emphasis. Nothing about us, without us. One of the great things that managers can do is listen to neurodivergent employees and to learn from us. For me personally, before I found out that I'm autistic, neurodiversity wasn't even a word that I knew of. And so for people that are neurotypical, they may not know what neurodiversity is, but they can learn, they can find out from us, they can ask us about neurodiversity.

That's assuming we've already told them that we're neurodivergent, of course.

So what I'd say is if there's something you don't understand about a neurodivergent employee why they find something particularly challenging in an appropriate way, seek to learn from them. Don't automatically jump to performance management processes to deal with a particular challenge that you're not sure how to deal with. Figure out how to harness their strengths, even think about how you can design the role that they're in to make the most of their strengths. I'd also encourage managers to join the employee networks of your local agency, that really takes the onus off of neurodivergent staff. Many neurodivergent staff are members of an ability network or a neurodiversity network, but that's self-advocacy, that's an emotional labour. It's something we're passionate about, but it's also an emotional labour. It takes often extra time. Often we're putting in time outside of business hours as well as time during business hours. And so I'd really encourage managers to join your local networks and take the onus off of neurodivergent staff.

DAVID PEMBROKE: Now, there's a follow-up question on Twitter from Leon Bruin Higgins who asks, to you, Andrew, "How can we best support and champion neurodivergent public servants, firstly as valued and equal members of the APS, and support them to make valued contributions to the public good? In this context, can you please perhaps elaborate a bit on the importance of language to achieve this?"

ANDREW PFEIFFER: Language is really important, but like Lee said earlier, there's no one size fits all. I follow a lot of other neurodiversity advocates on platforms like LinkedIn. And one of the things that I've learned from them is that there's a movement towards what we consider identity-first language. "I'm autistic, I'm ADHD." Over and above person-first language. "I have autism. I have ADHD." And I think it's good to be aware of those general trends. But at the end of the day, everyone has their own preferences, just like everyone has their own pronouns. And so, learn from us, learn from us as individuals. As Robin said earlier, if you've met one neurodivergent person, you've met one neurodivergent person.

ROBIN EDMONDS: I think in the APS, we really want always to have like one term, one phrase, and we want to know that that is industry standard best practice. And for those people who are listening to this thinking, "Oh no, these mean more questions," I think it's just good to bear in mind that we are not just talking about terminology here, we're talking about

identity. So, you know, people are going to form those opinions based on how they identify. So yeah, it will be quite individual, but sorry for anyone out there trying to write a dictionary.

DAVID PEMBROKE: So Robin, you love talking about building tailored support structures in your role as Inclusion and Diversity Advisor, when you advise workplaces on how to achieve inclusivity, what is the first step that you recommend that they need to take to build such support structures?

ROBIN EDMONDS: Now, I think the first thing to bear in mind when you talk about making workplaces more inclusive and for different types is that if you go to any organisation or any manager and you ask, "Are you inclusive of, you know, people with disability or very diverse staff?" They'll all say, "Yes, absolutely. All they need to do is come and tell me, and I'll be right there." But it's important to bear in mind that as at the last APS census and the Inclusion and Diversity Report published by the APSC last year, more than half of all staff who identify as disabled do not feel comfortable sharing that with their agencies. They won't report it, they won't tell their agency, they won't tell their manager. And that's just of the percentage of people who feel comfortable enough reporting it anonymously, which is about 8 per cent. In the population we know that people with disabilities at least 17 or 18 per cent, and that's the last full census, that was 2017.

Anyway, so the first thing to bear in mind is less than half at a minimum of the staff with disability are actually going to be known to you and neurodivergence isn't gathered at all, so we don't know who those people are. So the first challenge for an organisation is that you need to be inclusive of everyone in your organisation or those people won't come forward to ask for help. So that's the first big attitude shift. It's not about, you know, increasing... Maybe you have great structures already and people aren't using them and the reason they're not being used is because people are scared to come forward or ask their managers. So, first thing is, okay, inclusion is for everyone. And then actually, you'll find it gets a lot easier because everyone will be on board, they'll be really supportive, they'll want to put it in their enterprise bargaining, they're going to really want to negotiate for it. So, make sure that inclusion is for everyone.

In terms of how you can structure that. One of the things that I've worked on recently while also doing my masters in strategic communications was sort of an inclusive communication guide for managers and staff. The idea was it was just talking about your work preferences. Because I would get this question so often, "I have a new

manager," or, "I have a new staff member. How do I have the conversation with them about what they need? How do I make it not an accusation of them needing special adjustments right? Or not being able to meet the standard, how do I make it an organic conversation?" And just like Lee said in that manager conversation, you have to normalise it. Make it so that every manager has that conversation with every staff member, and realise that adjustments are not just about having wheelchair access to your meeting rooms. Adjustments can be things like, you know, the noise and lighting levels in your office, allowing people to wear noise-cancelling headphones or tinted glasses to work.

It may be recognising that some of your staff are going to perform much better if you ask them a question via email rather than over the phone or vice versa. Or maybe it's ensuring that the way that you are giving feedback or you know, channelling your expectations is really clear. So the first thing, again, you know, if it's accessible for everyone, then it benefits everyone. And if you just have that conversation about, "Actually, what is it that you're good at? How do you like to work and how do you like to communicate, take yourself back one step and think, "What if not everybody thinks the way I do and wants to communicate the same way I do?" Then you've sort of made that first step.

DAVID PEMBROKE: Excellent. So Lee, can you think of any outstanding initiatives where some of what we've discussed today is already in practice? And in connection to this, Gordon Douglas on LinkedIn has asked, "Is the Public service considering alternative recruitment formats to a standard job interview given what Andrew said a little bit earlier in one of his answers about the challenges of the traditional approaches to job interviews for neurodivergent people?"

LEE STEEL: So, I'm not sure I can answer the second question on what people are doing about recruitment. Again, it's not my field of expertise. I believe anecdotally that different organisations are looking into alternatives. But again, it's getting that balance with making sure it's still a merit-based process, but looking at alternatives. So I understand there's work happening, but I'm afraid I can't answer in any detail.

DAVID PEMBROKE: Fair enough.

LEE STEEL: In terms of outstanding initiatives, I understand there are some recruitment processes in different organisations across of APS. I am

wary about whether saying whether or not they're a success or whether or not they're outstanding, because I think the test of that is the feedback from the people who've gone through those programs themselves as well as the organisation. It's both the organisation and the employee who have to both say it's a success. And ideally, what I'd like to look for in terms of success is ongoing retention and thriving in a career, not just getting in the door. That's a good first step. That's a really good first step, but then you've got to find a workplace which enables people to thrive, and enables people to have a longer-term career rather than try something for you and it doesn't work out.

So again, I don't know that I can talk to successes, but it is an area where I think it's important that we collect more data and evaluation and look at what works, both in terms of that first step of getting people in the door recruiting, but also then looking at are we then tracking career development, career progression, and the ongoing connection beyond that first step of getting in the door? As Robin said, we don't really know how many neurodivergent people we already have in the APS because we don't measure it. It's something we are looking to do more on. But it's also then getting that more qualitative feedback about what works and what doesn't work. And again, it's got to be from the different perspectives of both the people who are neurodivergent maybe trying to come in and try new jobs, but it's also the organisations, is it working for them? Because again, we have a mission that we have to achieve in terms of service to the community as well.

DAVID PEMBROKE: Okay. So listen, we're coming up close to time, but I'm pretty keen to find out from each of you one thing that we can do to make workplaces better for neurodivergent people. And Lee, you've got the floor, so your one thing?

LEE STEEL: Well, my ask is for the senior leaders and managers, because I'm one myself. And it's about us as a cohort, we need to try harder to understand the diversity of people and to see where we can be more flexible. I mean, everyone's got their limits. And part of that learning experience is to know where you do have your own strong preference and being able to articulate it to people because it is always a trade-off working with other people. You don't always get everything you want. But one of the ways you can maybe get better out of your team is to be able to share more about yourself.

And in terms of investing in people, I think it is working with their strengths as much as you can, but also being willing to work with them on where they need to address a barrier to their career and to be able to coach them through that, and see what the solution might be, whether it's a different role, whether it's a different way to address a challenge. But again, focus on strengths, but there's also that ongoing work to make it work for everyone.

DAVID PEMBROKE: Okay. Now Robin, I suspect you've got more than one thing, but I'm going to limit you to one.

ROBIN EDMONDS: I suppose keeping on trend, you know, with what we've talked about, about engagement, I would say that my ask is to create opportunities for consultation and engagement with your neurodivergent staff. So don't expect engagement or feedback if you haven't created opportunities for them to engage. And if you are not getting responses to those opportunities then question whether or not they were really accessible. You know, was it online only or was it in fact only a town hall-type meeting? Give people opportunities to really engage and communicate with you before you go externally, before you try to outsource it. So seek advice from there, and make your systems internally more accessible.

DAVID PEMBROKE: Okay. Andrew, one thing?

ANDREW PFEIFFER: One thing? My ask is that organisations, particularly in the public sector, but I think this is applicable in the private and other sectors as well, is that they'd consider how neurodivergent strengths are recognised and supported in career pathways. So being autistic, I'm aware that a lot of autistic people have a tendency towards specialist skill sets. I mentioned data and IT earlier. And what I've found personally is that there are no obvious pathways from being a technical specialist to being a Senior Executive in the public service. I know that's something that was discussed in the hierarchy and classification review to bring it back to that theme of APS reform, but I'd love organisations to think about how neurodivergent strengths can be better recognised and supported. And to draw it back to Lee's comment earlier, about how neurodivergent staff can be given more career progression opportunities towards senior leadership.

DAVID PEMBROKE: Excellent. Well, Andrew, Robin and Lee, thank you so much for giving up some of your time to share with the audience, to share with the Work With Purpose audience, today's discussion about what is a critically important part of the future of the APS to ensure that there is that richness. We do get that diversity and we really do, are able to

better serve and carry out the mission. So thank you so much for coming into the studio today. We'll leave links to any studies and statistics that we reference in the show notes for the program. So to grow our listeners, if you want to engage with our podcast, please leave us questions or comments or to reach out to us at IPAA ACT, or on the contentgroup profiles on LinkedIn, or send us an email to events@act.ipaa.org.au. And thank you to all of those who did submit questions today for the episode because it enriched our conversation today.

And while I've got your attention, we'd also love for you to join IPAA ACT for the former secretary of the Department of Veterans' Affairs, Liz Cosson's Secretary Valedictory on the 21st of February. So that's Liz Cosson on the 21st of February. Just head to the act.ipaa.org.au website to register and remember to check with your organisation because if they're a member of IPAA ACT, you're a member too, and that means that you can attend that event for free.

Now, the next episode of Work With Purpose will be out in two weeks' time, but if you can't wait for more insights into the Public service, until then, you might want to catch up on past episodes. Work With Purpose is on all podcast platforms, Spotify, Apple Podcast, Stitcher, and more. Last but not least, if you've enjoyed today's episode, please leave us a review because what happens is that helps us to be found, and we also love hearing about what you think about our little podcast. In our next episode, we'll be talking about LGBTIQ+ pride in the Public service. So please, send us your questions and reach out via events@act.ipaa.org.au, and we look forward to hearing from you. Thanks for listening. My name is DAVID PEMBROKE, and it's bye for now.

Voiceover:

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